

Back to the Seasons of My Youth

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Back to the Seasons of My Youth

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Summary

Lan Wangji finds himself time- and dimension-traveling, but he really just wants to be back with his husband.

Notes

The second work from the Bunnies Central drabble relay race! We wanted to create a fic following [pocketfulofreccs](#) Exploring Tropes event. The trope for this month was Time Travel!

Additional thanks to Blue-ge ([ThisOneIsBlue](#) here on AO3) for their contribution! And to all the other bunnies who encouraged and cheered for us while writing this. Thank you all so much! ♥♥♥

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

When Lan Wangji blinks awake, he's in the Jingshi as usual. But the Jingshi itself is not usual; Wei Ying is not within reach, and the bed is cold. He gets out of bed, intending to search for his husband, but two things immediately strike him as wrong.

The first is that there is no sign of Wei Ying in the Jingshi. Of course, the man himself isn't there, but neither are any of his possessions—their possessions. It is like Wei Wuxian's existence has been wiped completely from their home.

The second is not as alarming, but even more confusing: his body is smaller. That is what he considers first, rising and striding over to the bronze mirror, and there he finds why his body is smaller.

He's younger; his teens, perhaps. A layer of baby fat still on his face, untouched by war and strife.

Lan Wangji blinks and assesses the situation as he dresses for the day, the disciple robes feeling lighter than the ones he wore as an adult. Something about the situation unsettles him. He steps out of the Jingshi and looks around. Cloud Recesses seems untouched and slightly different from what he's accustomed to. Before the Wen attack, then. His thoughts go briefly towards his father, his eyes sliding towards where he is in seclusion.

He shakes his head and continues walking. He passes many people he recognizes, few who have already been dead for a while. Lan Wangji's memories of them are faint, their features and voices obscured by time. But he sees and hears them clearly. Not the Incense Burner, then.

It takes every ounce of his self-control not to grab someone and ask what the year is, if the guest disciples have already come and left, what the state of the Wen sect is. Calmness will only help him; he breathes and ignores the rule against eavesdropping as he slows his steps and listens in to what the other disciples he encounters are saying.

Nothing about Qishan-Wen, but he does hear one of the senior disciples mention preparations for young masters that will be coming—evidence enough that it is before the study session that he and Wei Ying shared. But, he considers, as he comes to a stop mid-path, out of the way of the bustle of the morning, is this even *real*?

Is it some sort of illusion? But as he surveys his surroundings, everything looks and feels a little too real. The floor underneath his feet is solid. There's a bite to the air that stings his cheeks. They could feel and experience different sensations while using the Incense Burner, but those experiences hadn't been *this* intense.

He clutches Bichen's scabbard, feeling the embellishments on it dig into his palm. If this is an illusion, it is far more advanced than any Lan Wangji has ever encountered. Even his beloved's efforts had never been so detailed. He feels a stir of concern as he starts walking again. There's one possibility lingering in the back of his mind, waiting to be acknowledged. Wei Ying had mentioned it was possible, theoretically, but how and who would attempt such a thing? Wei Ying wouldn't but *who*?

The last thing he remembered was going to sleep with his husband. They had spent the week away from sect work and were just spending time together, there was nothing out of the ordinary at all. Wei Ying had helped the juniors with some work related to a night hunt, but nothing about it had related at all to something like time travel, or, he paused to consider, *dimensional* travel. For it is impossible for him to know which it is. If it even is either of those two options.

He needs to go to the library.

It's a blessing that he's already allowed free study in the mornings, as there is little the teachers can offer him. After breakfast, he accepts the offer to have tea with his uncle in the afternoon and sets off for the library pavilion.

If he can't find any information, he'll wait until Wei Ying arrives. If Wei Ying has traveled with him, surely he will have some thoughts on their situation. If Wei Ying *hasn't* traveled with him, he still possesses the same intuitive mind. Regardless of the timeline or dimension, Lan Wangji doesn't intend to keep away from his beloved. Wei Ying was too hard-won for Lan Wangji to waste even a breath apart from him.

He can rely on Wei Ying's natural inquisitiveness and intelligence. If Lan Wangji asks for assistance, Wei Ying will assist, that is the one unchanging aspect of his husband's character.

He quickly finds himself among a pile of scrolls and books, seeking any information that may provide better insight into his situation. He chooses the books from the openly accessible part of the library first. While Lan Wangji does have access to the forbidden section, he doesn't want to cause any suspicion. These will have to suffice for now.

Wei Ying arrives exactly like he did before and Lan Wangji immediately knows his beloved hasn't accompanied him. Something in his gut tightens at the thought of being without his husband once again but any version of Wei Ying is a Wei Ying he loves. He waits patiently until it is time, concealing a smile when a youthful version of his lover tries to trick him.

"Alcohol is forbidden in Cloud Recesses." He reprimands but he doesn't dissuade the boy, "As punishment, you must assist me."

Wei Ying almost protests but pauses, studying him for a moment, "Assist you?" There's a familiar intrigued light in those grey eyes and Lan Wangji nods, "Why does the Second Jade of Lan need this one's assistance?" Lan Wangji knows Wei Ying well enough to know he has already settled his mind. "And how do you know I can help?"

Lan Wangji gestures towards a more secluded spot, a niche where they can have a private conversation, "Wei Ying will know all, soon." He doesn't have any intention to lie or conceal things from his beloved.

Wei Ying studies him for a moment before nodding, "If you believe I can be of any help." And then he smiles, the same way Lan Wangji has remembered it to be.

Lan Wangji turns and leads them, and as they reach the spot, he begins, "Wei Ying, I have heard of your skill with spells and talismans," Wei Ying blinks at that, unable to suppress the

look of surprise, "I have reason to believe one was used on me."

The surprise morphs to an intense interest as he looks Lan Wangji over. Interest in a problem and considering solutions. So like the looks of interest Lan Wangji is used to receiving from his husband, yet so different. Again, his gut tightens and the sudden need to see his husband, *his* Wei Ying, almost overwhelms him.

"Lan-er-gongzi—"

"Lan Zhan," Lan Wangji interrupts, all caution thrown to the wind. This Wei Ying does not know the rule against interrupting yet.

"Lan Zhan," Wei Ying's voice becomes gentler, soothing. It is a tone he often uses when addressing their juniors. Lan Wangji feels amusement stir in him. Even now, even as a teenager, his first instinct is to comfort the distressed, "Why do you believe you've been hit by a spell? What kind of effects have you been experiencing?"

Lan Wangji considers the question and contemplates his reply. He cannot lie or mislead Wei Ying. If he does, his love will eventually notice and that would be a breach of trust. Wei Ying had once confessed that Lan Wangji's honesty had been a great comfort to him. He doesn't want to take that comfort away.

He formulates his reply carefully, "I believe I have been somehow... transported to either a dream or a different timeline." Gray eyes sharpen immediately, "I am younger than I should be."

Wei Ying considers him, "Lans do not lie." Lan Wangji nods, "And the Second Jade of Lan will have no cause to lie to some strange disciple from another sect."

"Mn."

"But your tale sounds almost too incredible to be true, Lan Zhan."

Lan Wangji looks him in the eye directly, "I have never lied to you." Wei Ying's expression shifts minutely, "And I will not start now."

"You know me." He observes and Lan Wangji nods. "I see."

—

Wei Wuxian examines the boy—is he a boy or does he just appear to be one, if he is younger than he should be? The Second Jade has a stoic expression on his delicate features, though his eyes are intense with something Wei Wuxian can't decipher. Despite his claim, he is maintaining an impressive calm.

They are familiar, or will be, enough to exchange birth names. Enough for Lan Wangji to trust him to help.

His eyes flick across bared skin. Neck, wrists, hands. Nothing so obvious. "Curse marks?"

"None" he gets the reply. Lan Wangji is looking at him. His actions are far from the stern reputed Second Jade, but it is exactly why he believes him.

He catches himself staring for too long and clears his throat, "Anything odd? Out of ordinary that you remember?"

And again he receives a negative response, and then the Second Jade adds "An incense burner we found was capable of creating an illusion," Wei Wuxian listens closely, his voice is melodious, "but we hadn't used it in months."

Used regularly? He doesn't question it, however curious he is, for another word catches his attention, "'We' as in...?"

Lan Wangji nods in confirmation, "Us"

How strange for the Second Jade to speak with such comfortable familiarity. "You were able to deduce its purpose quickly." Lan Wangji says, his speech casual, "You've always been more interested in spells and talismans than I."

"You believe the incense burner isn't responsible?" Wei Wuxian observes, his mind spinning. He's content to leave the matter of their future relationship for now. He's more curious about the Second Jade's claims about time or dimension travel. He has always believed it to be possible. After all, do they not have dimensional pockets in their qiankun pouches? This bears investigating.

"I do not. Illusions created by the incense burner have a distinctive feel. They rely on our memory of dreams."

"And dreams are rarely so detailed." Wei Wuxian completes the observation with a nod. He's still not entirely convinced. It is possible that Lan Wangji has been afflicted with some mind-altering spell that is making him believe this.

But the evidence indicates otherwise. Lan Wangji's familiarity with him speaks of a friendship that has lasted for a long time, that involves trust and loyalty. If Lan Wangji hadn't known Wei Wuxian well, he wouldn't have known to trust his younger self with such knowledge.

As tempted as he is, Wei Wuxian resolves to not ask any questions regarding their supposed 'future'.

—

Lan Wangji sees Wei Ying look down at the jars he's holding, and knows him well enough to know that he's contemplating whether Lan Wangji would let him take them inside, now that he is in need of his assistance. Lan Wangji wants to let him know that his care is not conditional, that Wei Ying is always welcome here.

Sure enough, just as Wei Ying looks up with a hopeful gaze and catches his eye, Wei Ying looks startled "A-ah, Young Master Lan!"

He nods slightly, still keeping eye contact with a gentle expression and it is Wei Ying who breaks it first, looking at the trees. "Wei Ying can do as he pleases, I trust Wei Ying." he says before Wei Ying can even bring up the question and turns to lead them back inside.

He hears him stumble behind him, a soft smile grows on his face. The younger Wei Ying, is the easier he is to catch off-guard, to *tease*. While Lan Wangji misses his husband, he already finds pleasure in this younger Wei Ying.

"But," he adds, letting a hint of the teasing into his voice, and he can feel Wei Ying freeze in place behind him, "I will not be so lenient if I see Wei Ying breaking rules again."

Then he does glance behind him again, and Wei Ying is flushed a pleasant pink-red. "Aiyo, Lan-er-gege," he finally manages to say, voice somewhat strangled, "Please take pity on this poor disciple, warn me if you intend to tease me again!"

Lan Wangji smiles to himself. They will figure out what is wrong and, more importantly, he will get to be with Wei Ying while doing it.

The next day they get to work together. Lan Wangji answers all of Wei Ying's questions without hesitation, watching as his grey eyes sparkle with anticipation of a challenge. Wei Ying becomes engrossed quickly enough, scanning the texts Lan Wangji gave him with an intense focus that most would consider uncharacteristic.

It is familiar. They bounce ideas off of each other, agree on some points, argue on others. "Shall we conduct an experiment?" Wei Ying asks finally after a long session of browsing through different texts. "I recite the major incidents that have happened in recent memory and you confirm whether they happened in yours."

Good idea. He nods and Wei Ying taps his fingers on the desk, "Wen Sect's annexure of the Bai Clan." He asks and Lan Wangji nods. That happened in his timeline too. "Trade alliance between YunmengJiang and LanlingJin." He grimaces, "Betrothal of Jiang Yanli and Jin Zixuan." Lan Wangji nods, "The floods at Laoling." He confirms that did occur. "Nie-zongzhu's third marriage."

Lan Wangji pauses. That, he doesn't remember. He tries to recall whether Nie-zongzhu had a third wife but he only remembers Nie Huaisang's mother to be his last wife. "When?" He asks.

Wei Ying arches his brow, a soundless 'ah' emerging from his lips. "Time travel and dimensional travel then?" Lan Wangji thinks over the questions and nods slowly. Wei Ying crosses his arms, "Nie-zongzhu married again three years after Nie-er-gongzi was born. It's strange that everything up to that point is so similar," the patch of skin between his eyebrows crinkles as he thinks, and Lan Wangji doesn't bother stopping himself from leaning forward, pressing his thumb to smooth the skin out. Wei Ying all but jumps in surprise, a blush overtaking him again.

"That suggests something changed within the time I was born," Lan Wangji says. It's a fascinating thought, and one he is tempted to pursue, but they have more important matters to handle. "Do you know of any artifact or spell that might cause such a thing to happen? I do

have to wonder where the Lan Wangji of this world has gone, with my soul inhabiting his body."

"His body? Lan-er-gege, do you not look like this?" Wei Ying asks.

"I am," Lan Wangji pauses, wondering how much he should divulge, "Older."

Wei Ying pouts at that, as if he wants more information and Lan Wangji is helplessly enamored. His Wei Ying is already so adorable but the younger version of him is even more so. Seeing his love in his original body is a painful reminder of what Wei Ying had to endure to find his current peace. This youthful beauty only makes him more aware of what Wei Ying lost along the way.

Wei Ying sways forward to look at the scrolls again and Lan Wangji is surrounded by the subtle fragrance of lotuses.

No amount of self-restraint could've stopped his reaction. He reaches forward to grab a strand of silken hair, rubbing his fingers along the length.

Wei Ying stills, his eyes tracking Lan Wangji's movements sharply. The Second Jade feels a pang and pulls away, putting respectable distance between them once again. Wei Ying studies him and Lan Wangji wonders if he will ask. There's a fetching hint of pink on his love's cheeks and he's certain it is the effect of his proximity.

"We were... close?" Wei Ying asks and Lan Wangji inwardly reprimands himself. He should have more control over his actions but—

This is Wei Ying and it has been so long since Lan Wangji has had to keep his hands to himself. He has gotten accustomed to Wei Ying welcoming his touch.

"Indeed," He says, drinking in those strange but familiar features. "We are."

'Beloved, beloved, if only you knew what you become to me,' Lan Wangji can't help but think as he resumes a proper posture, his heart suffering a pang of want. Wei Ying's lips part, ever so slightly, but he does not say anything, merely looking into Lan Wangji's eyes.

Caught, almost. "We *are*?" he breathes the question, as if he cannot truly believe it.

"Mn," and Lan Wangji can't help the way his eyes fix on those lips for a second too long, before meeting Wei Ying's quicksilver gaze again, "we are."

Wei Ying makes a choking noise, and finally looks away. "I—"

"Wangji?" They look up from their books to see Lan Xichen staring at them in question, his eyes flickering from Wei Ying to Lan Wangji. They both immediately rise to their feet and bow, and Wangji has to endure the expression on his brother's face turning from curious to teasing. His eyes seem to ask, *'Have you made a friend, didi?'*

Lan Wangji pointedly doesn't respond to the silent question and introduces his companions to each other. While he is content to let Wei Ying know about his situation, he doesn't wish to

share the details with his brother. He trusts Xichen with his life but there are some secrets best kept hidden.

Wei Ying, astonishingly, seems to understand that, "Lan Zhan has been helping me, Lan-gongzi," He says with a bright smile, "I hope I'm not keeping him from something important?"

"Indeed not," Lan Xichen responds with a smile as well, "I was just seeking some tea and company. You may join us if you wish, Wei-gongzi."

Wei Ying hesitates but Lan Wangji nods, "Wei Ying will accompany us."

"I will?"

"Mn."

He can see Wei Ying look at him yet again before nodding with a smile of his own, "I'd be happy to." Lan Xichen is obviously pleased.

As they walk, his mind wanders. His brother looks so much younger, carefree, not carrying the burdens of the bitter truth, his eyes still crinkling when he smiles. Wei Ying, Wei Ying is here, he is in his own body. They are..inexperienced, the scars that war left on them haven't been made yet.

And although they are different from the ones he knows, they are still his family. He wonders where his younger self must have gone. Had he been sent to the future in his place? Or perhaps another place, as he has, that is different from his own.

In this current time, how much of the suffering is avoidable? As he continues to think, they enter the Hanshi, where Xichen has already prepared a tea set. This, at least, is still familiar; even through his seclusion, they would take tea together, most often in their usual quiet but occasionally with Wei Ying's chattering presence. It seems as if he cannot escape reminders of what he is missing, with Wei Ying insisting on pouring the tea as Xiongzhong's mouth curves in a suppressed laugh.

"Wangji, I am glad to see you are making friends," his brother turns that laughing smile on him, amused and teasing.

"Mn," he takes his tea, savoring the scent and then taking a sip before he replies, "Wei Ying is a good friend."

Wei Ying chokes at that, and Xichen and Lan Wangji studiously ignore him as he gets himself under control. "Are you both prepared for classes to begin tomorrow?" Xichen asks, "I hear that Uncle has been...delightedly waiting to meet Young Master Wei?" his eyes take an amused light.

Delighted is too gentle of a word, Wangji thinks, he loves his Uncle but he can be rigidly stern. He remembers from watching Wei Ying teach in his own time, the contrast in teaching

was apparent. Though Uncle doesn't vocalise it, he showed his approval when he officially appointed Wei Ying. But the Uncle of his current time wouldn't appreciate it.

Wei Ying understands as brother sends an apologetic look, and laughs it off. "Don't worry Young Master Lan, this one is quite sturdy," as he pats himself on his chest, and Wangji is startled while Xichen only looks amused,

Wei Ying has always avoided talking of his past, of his life before Gusu, and he never had to, for the topic has never really been brought up. But now he feels concerned for the younger Wei Ying—to say such words—

Perhaps the concern shows on his face, for Wei Ying smiles brightly at him, as if holding onto a joke "Ah Lan Zhan don't look so worried, I'm the head disciple, I've been leading the night hunts! Of course, I'm sturdy!"

Xichen chuckles but Wangji knows Wei Ying, to him he is the Second Jade, not yet someone he can trust, so he drops it for a later time, but keeps it in mind.

—

Lan Wangji is quite surprised when the first lecture doesn't go as it did in his timeline. Wei Ying is certainly distracted and his uncle is too experienced a teacher to not notice. But Wei Ying answers all questions correctly, despite his distracted air, which means his uncle has nothing to reprimand him for.

He doesn't doubt that Wei Ying's mind is still on their research from the previous day. His love tends to direct his full attention to a puzzle, often disregarding everything else around him. His preoccupation certainly rattles his martial brother.

Jiang Wanyin

Lan Wangji is too old to hold a grudge against a teenager but something in his chest burns at the sight of that man standing by Wei Ying's side like he has earned that right. It takes conscious effort not to reach for Bichen or pull Wei Ying away from the man. That's why Lan Wangji doesn't even wait for the room to clear before approaching his beloved. He eyes the Jiang heir's stiffening posture with concealed disdain and meets Wei Ying's gaze.

"Shall we?" he gestures towards the door, asking for Wei Ying to precede him.

The gesture is deliberate. It shows Jiang Wanyin how much he values Wei Ying and it is also charming enough to bring a pretty blush to his beloved's cheek. Lan Wangji conceals his satisfaction as Wei Ying waves off his friends and accompanies him without question.

He meets Nie Huaisang's eyes briefly as they walk past. There's something familiar there but not in the calculating way he has become used to. No, this Nie Huaisang has the familiar gaze of someone about to get up to trouble, and the way his eyes sharpen upon seeing Wei Ying bodes nothing good. "Wei-gongzi, I presume?" he all but skips over to Lan Wangji and Wei Ying, flicking his fan away with a grin. "And this must be the famous Lan-er-gongzi, this humble one is honored, *honored!*"

"Nie-er-gongzi," Wei Ying gives him an amused bow, "I have heard much about you."

"Only good things, I hope," Nie Huaisang says breezily, snapping the fan back open as he looks from Wei Ying to Lan Wangji. "And hopefully not from my biaojie, she's never forgiven me for corrupting my biaodi." A shout comes from a guest house near them, and Nie Huaisang nervously giggles, "I believe that is my cue to be anywhere but here! I will see you in our classes, hm?"

Wei Ying chuckles when they're again alone, "Ah, Nie-zongzhu's third wife is related to Wen-zongzhu. I believe her brother has two children; perhaps you've heard of them in your world? Wen Qing and Wen Qionglin."

Lan Wangji is able to suppress the sharp intake of breath, but not the way his eyes widen. And Wei Ying doesn't ask. Wei Ying has always been sharp—if Sect Leader Nie hadn't been married to their aunt, there would be no need for interaction among them.

He sees the way he comes to the same conclusion. If a war breaks out, "Wen Qionglin is honorable," he begins, "and Wen-guniang was as well, their branch did not partake in any bloodshed."

Wei Ying listens as his simple sentences convey information much more complicated before he can say more, Wei Ying shakes his head, eyes shrewd, "I understand." Wangji nods in response to the unspoken request. Wei Ying doesn't wish to know more now but he may ask questions later.

They walk in silence towards the library pavilion but the furrow in Wei Ying's brows tells him his love is preoccupied. He glances forward and instinctively places a hand on Wei Ying's waist, guiding him out of the path of an elder who seems to be in a bit of a hurry.

The elder doesn't notice the gesture, only nodding to their bows. But Wei Ying certainly does, his short glance in Wangji's direction is sharp and assessing.

"Very close," He murmurs to himself, biting his lip, his expression uncharacteristically shy. Wangji is entirely charmed by the look in Wei Ying's eyes, tentative and soft. A hint of interest and wonder.

Wangji has long since accepted that Wei Ying's flirtations came from a place of mischief and ignorance. His love hadn't considered romantic relationships seriously, regardless of how often he flirted or indulged in adult reading materials.

It had been Wangji's obvious care and concern that had nudged their relationship forward. He conceals a smile and deliberately places a hand on the small of Wei Ying's back again, guiding him forward.

A little gift for his younger self, perhaps. If he had received such help at this age, perhaps it would not have taken them so long. And this Wei Ying is receptive, not shying away but curious and tentatively accepting.

The library pavilion is empty and quiet, the guest disciples avoiding it while they still can. Wangji is thankful; they're less likely to be interrupted, and he will not have to curb his words on the chance that somebody else may hear him. He sits and waits.

It only takes a few minutes for Wei Ying to look at him. "A lot has happened in your world."

It is a statement, but there is an underlying question there, a question that Wangji does not quite know the answer to. Instead, he nods, and turns back to the scrolls and books they have been working through, "With the knowledge that this is both dimensional and time-based, it is possible you may not experience the same thing." Wangji replies, "I still find myself... hesitant."

Wei Ying hums, sitting in a careless sprawl. Wangji traces the long, lean body with his eyes, almost amused by the stir of desire within him. He shouldn't think of a boy so young in such terms but Wei Ying is Wei Ying. It is impossible for Wangji to not desire him. But he doesn't plan to do anything about it. Let that be his younger self's privilege.

"It is wise to be cautious, I suppose." Wei Ying replies, reaching for one of the scrolls, "And as close as we supposedly are in the future," Wei Ying glances at him, somewhat shy, "You would not wish to trust your friend's younger self with important information. I can be... *impulsive* sometimes."

"*Friends*," Wangji quotes him in amusement and Wei Ying flushes. His love has never been stupid but he decides not to tease him too much. "Those are someone else's words in your mouth, Wei Ying." He reprimands, "You act quickly but never without thought." He sits down before the boy and nudges another scroll towards him, one that contains more information on dimensions, "I am concerned about the impact of knowledge. While you may not act recklessly, simply *knowing* things can influence your decisions."

Wei Ying picks up the offered scroll with a small frown between his brows, his expression thoughtful. "I see."

There's a blink and a waver. Wei Ying freezes and Wangji feels his vision blur for a moment before he's staring at Wei Ying. *His Wei Ying*. His beloved's soul is in an entirely different body. "Wei Ying?" He asks, hope stirring in his chest. But even as he looks at his husband, he notices something strange. This Wei Ying's expression is still slightly distant and wary. It doesn't contain the unending sea of love and affection he has become accustomed to.

The stranger before him blinks rapidly, his eyes widening slightly as he takes in Wangji's adult form, "Lan Zha—Lan-er-gongzi? You're an... adult again?"

Wangji looks around and recognizes the small differences between the current and past library pavilion. He's certain his husband is responsible for this and probably has made an error. He closes his eyes briefly in dismay. His younger self and his husband are probably in the past dimension right now.

Wei Ying also arrives at the same conclusion and bites his lip, "My future self is trying to resolve this?" Wangji nods and looks around, seeking out any books or notes his husband may have left behind.

They are not difficult to find but they are, as is expected for his Wei Ying, somewhat *unreadable*. He's had plenty of time to familiarize himself with his husband's habits of research, but in this case, he does not quite know what he is looking at, nor what he is looking for. Some notes are clearly left from previous research—privacy talismans, and a long-distance teleportation talisman—but most seem to be about their current dilemma.

"What is all this?" Wei Ying asks, picking through some of the disorganized sheets, eyes sharp with interest. "I've never seen—huh, that's interesting. Oh, this is, too! Who wrote these?"

Wangji cannot help the smile that ticks his lips upward at the familiar look of interest on Wei Ying's face. "You did," he says, and Wei Ying looks at him with wide eyes, as if he cannot truly believe himself capable of such scholarship. Oh, they must solve this quickly because Wangji badly needs to kiss his husband.

Wei Ying must have noticed the look in his eyes as he flushes red and focuses on the pages, quickly scanning over them. There are plenty of them and Wangji is content in watching him. A few minutes pass and Wei Ying looks back at him, "These..." he begins, and continues after confirming his suspicion.

"If I'm not mistaken, there are certainly some pages missing..." he's frowning and Lan Wangji does too. They look through the ones on the desk and then through some other places but none of them match. "It mentions something here, but the next sentence is cut off," Wei Ying points at the paper, "we could essentially use it but..." incomplete arrays and talismans should never be used.

But Wangji is conflicted over another matter. Were the pages simply misplaced? No one should have access to Wei Ying's things other than family, and he doubts any of the disciples would touch the things, no matter how curious, due to previous incidents.

"Let's wait for the future me...since he knows how to properly attempt it," Wei Ying says finally, though hesitant. His eyes look over, this time taking in the changes. After Cloud Recesses was rebuilt, the designs were different from those in the past. Surely, Wei Ying, as observant as he is, would notice.

They both hear a voice call out to them from the door of the library, heavy with gruff disapproval, "that boy!" They turn around to see Lan Qiren step into the library and focus his eyes on Wei Wuxian, "Disciples complained of a surge of qi. Wei Wuxian, why aren't you experimenting with your talismans in the Mingshi as you always do?" Wei Ying looks completely taken aback, staring at Shufu with wide eyes.

"Well?" His uncle demands, "You needed my assistance?" Wangji arches a brow at that. Wei Ying was the most brilliant cultivator in Cloud Recesses. It was unlikely he needed any help.

"I... um," Wei Ying glances at him uncertainly and Wangji conceals a smile.

He steps forward and bows to his uncle, "Shufu, I am back but it seems Wei Ying has now switched places with his younger counterpart." Lan Qiren glances at Wei Ying sharply, something assessing and contemplative in his gaze. Wangji already knows what his uncle is

thinking. Wangji has thought of it as well. How can they stop the tragedies their Wei Ying suffered from happening to this younger, more vulnerable version of him?

"I see," he says shortly, frowning and concern evident on his face as he looks Wei Ying over. He turns his gaze to Wangji, "From what moment?"

And Wangji answers, "A day after the arrival of guest disciples to Gusu." and Lan Qiren's frown twists even more as he strokes his beard.

"Wuxian," he starts, and Wei Ying looks at him in surprise both at being addressed by Lan Qiren, who had mostly ignored him in his present, and at being called so familiarly.

"La-Lan-xiansheng," he says, flustered, and immediately stands to bow.

"None of that," Lan Qiren says, "You are likely as confused as I and Wangji are. Know that no harm will come to you while you are in Cloud Recesses, and we will do our utmost to keep your presence secret here. I must request you both have tea with me this afternoon but, until then, Wangji will attend to you. Wangji, I expect a report of what you experienced when next we speak."

Wangji bows to his uncle again as he says that. In truth, it goes without saying that he will attend to Wei Ying, but this Wei Ying still does not seem fully cognizant of that. Lan Qiren leaves them, and Wangji begins to stack his Wei Ying's notes and papers. "We will check the Mingshi for any other notes," Wangji says to Wei Ying, who still has a slightly dazed look on his face, "And then you need food and rest."

It is a testament to how baffled he is about everything that Wei Ying doesn't reply with more than a nod, and he's incredibly docile as Wangji corrals him toward the Mingshi, taking less-traveled paths to avoid anyone seeing them. When they reach the Mingshi, Wei Ying hesitantly looks at him but doesn't ask the obvious question, instead his eyes take in this area of Cloud Recesses he hasn't seen before. Lan Wangji opens the door and steps inside, the dim lighting of the building is calming their senses.

Wei Ying follows him as he walks over to look for the notes, he hears him shift behind him. "Ah, Lan Zhan," he pauses and looks back, patiently as Wei Ying's eyes roam over the interior.

"Is it okay to bring a stranger into..." he trails off.

Wangji responds as he turns back to continue his search, lips pulling up slightly, "Wei Ying is not a stranger." He doesn't need to look back in order to see Wei Ying's face flushing as he inevitably understands the implication.

Wei Ying clears his throat, "One could argue I am in fact a stranger, I'm not the one acquainted...with everything here."

Lan Wangji replies without hesitating, "Wei Ying is Wei Ying, he is always welcome here," he says clearly, "This is Wei Ying's home."

Wangji finally turns back to see his beloved frozen, his face turning redder and redder, Wei Ying avoids looking at him as he speaks, "Then...Lan-er-gongzi...are you and I...?"

Before he can finish, Wangji answers him, eyes gentle, "Mn, we are married."

There's a sharp inhale from Wei Ying, and he flushes a charming red as Wangji looks at him. "I," he starts, then abruptly quiets, biting his lip. "*married*, Lan-er-gongzi?" he finally squeaks out, fingers twisting in his robes—the white, distinctly Gusu-Lan robes that Wei Ying has slowly adopted into his wardrobe.

"Mn," Wangji shifts closer to him, takes his wrist and gently tugs one hand free from the white silk. He understands Wei Ying's surprise and hesitance. To learn that he is married into Gusu-Lan, to a boy he had never met before, and all that amidst a plot of time travel? It would be enough to cause anyone to break down, and the fact that Wei Ying is still following along is a testament to his own strength. It is a snap decision to gently tug him along, to the low table that Wei Ying can typically be found at when he tests his talismans, "Rest. I will be finished shortly, then we may go to the Jingshi."

And despite himself, Wei Ying's face flushes even brighter. Wangji watches with an amused smile before he goes back to searching. Page after page, he looks them over, among the ones he recognizes for other talismans he puts back neatly and then continues to sort the ones more unfamiliar.

By the time he gathers them all and turns back to Wei Ying, he has calmed down and his face is no longer as red but he's certainly distracted. He taps him lightly on his shoulder and Wei Ying almost jumps. He shows him the pages with a soft smile but Wei Ying stares at him slightly dazed. Wangji frowns in concern.

"Are you well?" He reaches over to touch his forehead, but Wei Ying immediately stands up.

"Of course, Lan-er-gongzi! This one is perfectly fine!" he quickly utters, waving his hands.

His concerned eyes linger, but he nods, "If Wei Ying feels unwell—"

Wei Ying frantically shakes his head, "I'm perfectly healthy!"

Wangji closes his eyes and sighs, "Alright, let us go to the Jingshi."

Wei Ying has always been curious and inquisitive. He looks around the Jingshi with fascinated eyes, his eyes lingering on a desk littered with paper and some open books, a few bottles of Emperor's Smile, and a dark red inner robe hung close to an incense burner.

They're all traces of Wei Ying and the younger version of him takes them in silently, his expression almost unreadable. He still looks a little flushed but there's a contemplative expression on his face now, like he's seeing something interesting.

Wangji knows exactly what has caught Wei Ying's attention. His husband's presence is not some secret tucked out of sight. No one can look at the Jingshi and think it isn't shared by two people with different personalities. Wei Ying has left his mark in almost every corner.

He isn't a burden or a guest here. He owns the Jingshi as much as Wangji does. He is the master of his home as much as Wangji is. He is family.

And Wangji knows that means everything to his husband now. He doesn't comment on the longing on Wei Ying's face, just gently nudges him towards the desk. "He may have left behind a few more notes here," he says of his husband, and Wei Ying goes forward, brushing his fingers against the dark wood of the desk. He almost-reverently catalogs the papers and objects atop the burnished wood, running his fingers over the high-quality horn and weasel-hair brushes, the stacks of talisman paper weighted down by odd, expensive trinkets, the cinnabar and ink and—

Altogether, it paints an obvious picture, as obvious as the rest of the room. Wei Ying is important, and his work is as important as he is. No aspect of his being is devalued, and instead he, in his entirety, is accepted. *Cherished*.

Wangji has, over the course of their marriage, learned more about Wei Ying's upbringing in the Jiang sect. He knows that, for this Wei Ying, nobody has truly shown him the love of a family since his parents. Nobody has truly valued him for himself as he has deserved. Perhaps Wangji is biased against those that are, in his time, long-dead or long-absent, but he holds few good feelings towards Jiang Fengmian and his family.

"Just these?" Wei Ying asks, shuffling together the loose papers, flicking through them in interest

Wangji's lips twitch into a slight smile and he gestures towards a large collection of scrolls and books in the far corner of the room. "I daren't mess with your system," He says, amused. Wei Ying has a strange way of organizing his work and Wangji has never been able to decipher it. He just asks his husband when he needs some of Wei Ying's research.

The younger Wei Ying eyes the stacks curiously, stepping towards him, "I... wrote all of these?" he asks, scanning the surprisingly neat calligraphy. It is a sign of how invested Wei Ying is in his research.

"I..." he hesitates, "I...work here?"

Wangji frowns, finding the question strange. He knows his husband, understands the deepest layers of him, but there are certain things Wei Ying has dealt with on his own before Wangji entered the picture.

"You are a valuable member of our sect," he says, "You handle most of our active training. The oldest junior disciples are under your supervision during nighthunts," Wangji explains and Wei Ying turns around to look at him with wide eyes, "you have also upgraded many of our library texts."

Wei Ying swallows, turning to look at one open scroll, "Musical cultivation?" There's enough longing in his voice for Wangji to narrow his eyes.

"You are very skilled at musical cultivation. Your dizi is your primary weapon."

Wei Ying looks slightly wistful. "But Madam Yu would never let me pla—" he pauses and shakes his head, "nevermind—"

Wangji's eyes narrow further, but he does not push. Wei Ying is allowed to divulge aspects of his previous life (though such a term is ill fit when applied to this younger boy) as he wishes. If Wangji off-handedly muses about ridding Yu Ziyuan of her privileges and prestige in a public manner? Well. No one needs to know. Perhaps—

"Lan Zhan?"

Wangji blinks, Wei Ying's voice dissipating his thoughts as a breath of fresh air would dust clouds.

Wei Ying's eyes have taken on a mischievous gleam and his tone is wheedling when he says, "Lan Zhan, do you suppose Lan-laoshi will permit this humble disciple to access Cloud Recesses's back hills? Since I'm part of the Lan in your time?"

"I am aware," Lan Wangji murmurs, "that you had been partaking in leisure activities with Nie-er-gongzi in the forbidden areas for quite some time during our disciple days."

Wei Ying had admitted that on an evening stroll in one of Caiyi town's portly marketplaces, hibiscus hued lips parting appealingly as he'd recounted his and Nie Huaisang's fishing escapades.

Foreseeing Wei Ying's adamant denial, Wangji adds: "Shufu could hardly refuse your requests, as you are a member of our family."

"But first," he lets his tone go a little admonishing, "You have not eaten since this morning." Since before the abrupt time- and dimension-travel, he doesn't need to say. "We will look through the notes and, after, take our midday meal."

That seems to settle Wei Ying, having a plan of action. He nods, and Wangji takes them back to the table that they usually sit at for meals. Though they could sit on opposing sides, Wangji instead leads Wei Ying to sit next to him. Some notes they can set aside immediately, those to do with unrelated talismans, those that are just small drawings of rabbits.

There does seem to be a theme emerging, one of temporal displacement, but it is not a theory that Wangji has spent much time considering. From the stiff concentration on Wei Ying's face, he also is at a loss, and it does look like the situation will take some time to resolve. Wangji scans over Ying-er's notes and feels a pulse of longing in his chest. If it was his Wei Ying, he'd have pulled him onto his lap and stolen a few kisses from his mischievous love already. They would've been sprawled on the floor, with him pressing his precious husband close and feeling the warmth of his body against his.

He shifts and glances at their bed, neat and well-made. It hasn't been properly used for days. His body misses the familiar heat of Wei Ying so much, it is almost unbearable.

"Lan-laoshi?" Wangji blinks and focuses on Wei Ying. He doesn't know what kind of expression he wears but little a-Ying flushes under his scrutiny and turns his head away.

Wangji knows Wei Ying well enough to spot signs of desire. Usually, it makes him drag his husband close and have his fill. Now it only makes the ache in his chest grow sharper and more intense.

"Yes, Wei Ying?" He asks, turning his attention towards the papers.

Wei Ying is silent for a moment and Wangji turns to meet his keen, assessing gaze in question.

The boy tilts his head to the side, "You really love him." There's wonder lining his voice, like he can't believe it possible. Wei Ying is used to being well-liked but he hasn't been truly loved since he lost his parents.

Wangji reaches forward to gently tuck a strand of hair behind Wei Ying's ear, lingering briefly to caress a flushed cheek with the back of his fingers. "I love you. All parts and aspects of you," he says softly, every word sincere.

"You are part of the whole of me; without you, I am nothing." Wei Ying's lips part, and his eyes have reddened. To know that he is loved and desired, so wholly and so unconditionally, must be a great surprise, an unknown to this Wei Ying who is still so beaten down. a-Ying huffs out a breath that is half-sob, turning away from Wangji to hide the emotion overwhelming him.

That won't do.

Wangji takes one hand, then both, the familiar weight of his husband's hands in his a comfort for him. And, he hopes, for this young a-Ying. "Ying-er," he calls, and Wei Ying finally turns back to him.

"This is," a-Ying says, heaving a deep breath to settle himself, smiling softly at Wangji, "a lot to take in. Forgive me, Lan-laoshi."

"Wei Ying does not need to apologize," Wangji says, letting his thumbs soothe circles into Wei Ying's palms, "There is no need between us." Once Wei Ying seems somewhat settled, he lets go of his hands and sits back.

He can tell Wei Ying is absentminded as he looks through the pages, as he raises his head to catch a few glimpses, and then continues on. He shifts around while reading through them, his face slowly turns red. He places down the notes and slightly rubs at his cheeks but is a futile effort as the blush doesn't fade.

Wei Ying clears his throat, "The notes are....put together well, but making the array might take time." he says, and Wangji stands up. Wei Ying's eyes follow him as he reaches out a hand; Wei Ying places his own into Wangji's, and Wangji pulls him.

Perhaps he uses too much force, perhaps Wei Ying was caught off guard, but the next moment he's hugging Wei Ying as all his bodyweight shifts to him when he stumbles. If his beloved's face was flushed before, it's an entirely deeper shade of red now. His head rests on

Wangji's chest and before Wei Ying can move back, Wangji encircles his arms around his waist.

This Wei Ying is so easy to tease. Wei Ying squeaks, "Lan Zhan!" as he's pulled into Wangji's chest, his eyes pointedly not looking at Wangji but keeping them below his neck. Though this Wei Ying is nervous and unused to the affection, he doesn't pull away. Wangji wants to keep holding him and sheltering him.

Wei Ying closes his eyes shut and hides his face in Wangji's robes, he mumbles something, muffled by Wangji's clothes, "What is it?" He asks and Wei Ying shivers as he hears his voice.

He speaks a little louder this time, "How does future me handle it when you look at him...?"

Wangji is amused. *His* Wei Ying had uttered said something similar to him before. He reaches forward and presses a soft kiss to Wei Ying's temple before finally letting go. Wei Ying's hand immediately reaches up to the place and he whines, "Lan er-gongziiiii" Wei Ying looks at him wide-eyed, face burning hot. He has seen the look before, flustered but wanting more.

Before Wangji can say or do anything more, there's a knock at the door and the soft familiar voice enters the room, "Hanguang-jun? Senior Wei?"

Wei Ying moves to pull away but Wangji keeps him close, his touch gentle and non-threatening. He doesn't want to overwhelm him, but he doesn't want a-Ying to shy away either. Wangji had been drawn to Wei Ying when he was young but he hadn't known the one his heart desired. He hadn't understood what strife Wei Ying had to overcome to be the cheerful, confident boy that he was.

His younger self may not treat a-Ying with as much kindness as he deserves—not at first. He wants to imprint the potential of their relationship in the younger boy's mind. He wants to give Wei Ying something to hold on to, something that will comfort him if Wangji's younger self reacts poorly.

Sizhui enters once Wangji gives permission, not even blinking an eye at the sight of them sitting so close. "Lan-laoshi asked me to deliver these scrolls to you." Wangji looks at Wei Ying, who is eyeing Sizhui in interest.

"Thank you," Wangji nods, "Would you like to stay for our meal?" Sizhui is a perceptive child. He glances at Wei Ying, who shows no signs of recognition or familiarity, who hasn't greeted Sizhui with anything but a nod.

"You look tired, baba," Sizhui addresses Wei Ying directly, his soft eyes concerned, "Are you unwell?"

And Wei Wuxian freezes, he stares blankly at Sizhui and then towards Wangji. He alternates between them as he raises a hand to point at himself, "Baba?" Sizhui nods slowly and for a moment things are silent, before Wei Ying's face turns scarlet.

"Baba, I'm a father, I have a *son*," he mumbles, eyes wide as they take in Sizhui from head to toe. He gets up and moves toward Sizhui, and circles around him, taking his appearance in full. Sizhui watches patiently with a smile until Wei Ying stops in front of him, "My son?" Sizhui nods. "What's your name?" he asks a bit quieter.

"Lan Yuan, courtesy Sizhui" Sizhui answers softly, Wei Ying repeats it and raises a hesitant hand.

"May I?" And Sizhui's smile turns brighter as his hand comes to rest on his cheek. Sizhui places his own hand on top of Wei Ying's as he leans into the touch, and, for a long, quiet moment, Wangji worries that this might be too much for this young a-Ying, that this is an overstep. But then Wei Ying lurches forward and wraps Sizhui in a hug.

"A son! And so handsome and powerful!" He pulls back again, holding Sizhui at arm's length to look him over, and that earns a soft laugh from their son.

"Baba never changes," Sizhui says. A tease, but a kind one that quiets into a small smile as he is the one to gather Wei Ying close in another tight hug. "I am glad to see you, baba. A-Die?" he looks to Wangji, not releasing Wei Ying, but Wei Ying does not seem as if he wants to be released.

Wangji cannot say no to his son, or his husband. He steps closer and takes both in his arms, a rare gesture but one that feels appropriate. They stand closely together for a moment, and Wangji is content. When they separate, Wei Ying's face only has a slight blush from the hug.

His eyes still linger on Sizhui when he notices something. "Your ribbon is crooked slightly," he says as he reaches to fix his ribbon; Sizhui stays still while speaking,

"Elder Lan said these were some relevant scrolls for baba's situation," he says as Wei Ying steps back after fixing his ribbon, "he also sent for some spicier foods." Wei Ying looks surprised but then it turns into a cheery smile as he pulls Sizhui into a conversation.

Wangji thinks Uncle doesn't know about the past being changed yet and more likely sent an offering of apology, of his past self's words for the day.

Wei Ying turns to him and the look in his eyes has changed. There's a glow recognizable from his Wei Ying, something he used to wear in the earliest days of their marriage. A slowly growing hope that yes, he gets to have this, that this isn't another thing life will cruelly snatch away at some point. It is a glow of hope, of anticipation and joy.

It warms his heart to see it in a-Ying. He nods to Sizhui as he bows to them and leaves before gesturing towards their meal before Wei Ying can become engrossed in those scrolls, "Eat first." This time, Wei Ying willingly sits by Wangji's side. He hides a smile as he serves the food, transferring the spicy bits to Wei Ying's bowl absentmindedly.

The blush on the boy's face is quite fetching.

Wei Ying is quiet throughout the meal, his gaze distant as he mulls over their situation. So far, he has been remarkably patient, never asking questions unless Wangji volunteers

information but Wangji knows that restraint isn't going to last for long, especially not now.

"I was... permitted to leave YunmengJiang and marry into the Lans?" Wei Ying asks after the meal is done. Wangji pauses, considering the question carefully. This Wei Ying has suffered under the Jiangs but he is still loyal to them. He doesn't have the comfort of knowing that he doesn't owe them anything. He wonders how to approach this.

"They never deserved your loyalty or care," He says finally, ignoring how Wei Ying stiffens, his eyes uncertain, "I am your husband, beloved, there's little I don't understand about you and your life." Wei Ying winces and drops his gaze, fiddling with his sleeve as Wangji continues, "You were willing to do, you did everything for them but... circumstances forced you to realize your future didn't lie with them. You decided it well before we had realized our love for each other."

Wei Ying's mouth opens, then closes again. "And," he asks hesitantly, after another careful pause, "Madam Yu? Jiang-shushu?"

"Irrelevant," Wangji says, because he does not wish to share their deaths with this Wei Ying, not when it is likely that the same will be avoided in his timeline. But he is sure to let the disapproval sink into his voice with that one word, show his opinion on the man that had taken Wei Ying in and the woman that had used him as a scapegoat. "I wanted this, you wanted this," he firmly says, "any others are irrelevant. Gusu-Lan stands behind us in this."

And a-Ying looks almost awed that anyone would do that, let alone an entire sect. The blush flares again, and he looks utterly charming as he shyly asks, "What is my role here? In Cloud Recesses?"

Wangji lets a smile begin to tug at his lips. Speaking on his husband's accomplishments is something he is happy to do, regardless of the rules to not have excessive pride. "You are a beloved teacher. Shufu handed off many of his classes to you."

Wei Ying looks excited and contemplative as he listens, "You lead the nighthunts with the juniors and you have your own place to experiment. You dabble in new forms of musical cultivation," he says and Wei Ying eyes are bright "Your inventions used well over the cultivation world" Wangji speaks and his voice softens.

"Wei Ying is Gusu Lan's most valuable cultivator," Wangji shifts his tone, and Wei Ying notices, he looks up at him through his lashes, "He is uncle's most valuable nephew in law, he appreciates your wisdom," Wangji says leaning closer, "Brother loves having you around for tea, he delights in your company," he says and raises up his hand to curl around Wei Ying's white ribbon.

"You are Sizhui's father, he adores your presence, you loved to bury him in soil and claim it helps him grow taller and stronger." He smiles slightly, his face flushing as Wangji brings Wei Ying's ribbon to his lips maintaining eye contact, "And you are my beloved husband, my Wei Ying, forever."

Wei Ying leans forward, almost mesmerized. There's nothing guarded or wary about him. Something about Wei Ying's easy trust sends a pang through him because he knows how

much it is tested later. Hopefully, not in a-Ying's universe. Hopefully, their younger versions manage to avoid some of the issues they face.

He raises a hand and brushes a warm cheek tenderly, running a thumb along the smooth skin, "You are free, Wei Ying. There are no debts or chains holding you here. You remain because you wish to, because you love and are loved in return. This is your home." He lifts the ribbon and caresses the cloud motif on it carefully, "A Lan in heart and spirit."

"Aiya, Lan Zhan, what are you doing to my poor younger self?" Wangji sucks in a breath and looks to the side. a-Ying leans back, covering his flushed face with a trembling hand.

"Xingan," He breathes, rising to his feet quickly. His Wei Ying is still trapped in his younger body but just the tone of his voice and the smile on his face tells Wangji everything. Ying-er doesn't hesitate to step forward and cup his face, worried grey eyes scanning his features carefully.

"Have you been well, husband?" He asks, tugging his ribbon in a meaningful gesture designed to settle him. Wangji swallows and nods, unable to help himself. He draws his beloved into a soft, chaste kiss, mindful of two young eyes on him. His younger self sucks in a small, sharp breath but Wangji is content to ignore it. He closes his eyes and leans in, pulling away from the tempting lips to kiss along Wei Ying's cheek and bury his nose just under his ear.

"You have returned," He says, unnecessarily.

"Hmm," His Wei Ying agrees, "We just need to determine how to get little a-Ying back to his body and send both of them back."

Wangji finally looks up to meet his younger self's wide eyes and withholds a sigh. This must be handled carefully. It is time to show his younger self how happy he can be before he sets himself against Wei Ying.

"Shufu expects us for tea," he glances meaningfully at a-Ying, who has also stood and has shuffled back some to give them space, trading shy looks with his own younger self. His Wei Ying smiles, a knowing and only somewhat mischievous expression, and gives his ribbon one last tug before releasing him.

"We wouldn't want to keep Bo-shu waiting!" he bounds over to his body, to a-Ying, and drags him toward the door. a-Ying looks only slightly bemused, and instead turns to his younger-older self, who has already begun speaking.

"Lan Wangji," Wangji says, bowing formally to his past self. The bow is stiffly returned, and, after, Wangji gestures for him to sit at the uncleared table while he makes tea.

There is a tense, uncomfortable silence between them while he clears the dishes from his and a-Ying's lunch, boils the water. But it is a silence that Wangji is used to, as it is his own silence. "You may call me Hanguang-jun," he says when the tea is ready and he is seated across from his younger self.

"I-" begins the younger Wangji, his ears are red as he fumbles for words. He whispers a soft, "Shameless" and Wangji thinks it is perhaps Wei Ying's influence the reason why he feels amusement.

He adds a simple "Mn" of agreement as he passes forward the tea. Younger Wangji grips it tightly, clearly unsettled.

"Wei Ying..." he swirls his tea as he answers the unasked question, "Indeed, he is our husband," he says looking at younger Wangji who is avoiding looking at him.

"Uncle.." he takes a sip "Uncle is happy, we are happy," Whether that means the younger or the present versions of them, it still holds the same meaning.

"It will come to clear," he begins as his younger self looks up at him, eyes searching. He gives a serene smile, content and warm, "He is the one you're meant to be with," Younger Wangji's shoulders shake, and he softens.

"Sizhui is our child, a master of the six arts," He begins and his younger self is caught off guard, looking at him a bit blankly. Wangji's lips twitch in amusement, he can see that he is stuck on 'our child'. He breathes a sigh, "He is our child now, but his childhood was... difficult." And he knows he has his younger self's full attention.

"He could not have Wei Ying in his life..until recently-" he trails off into a conversation, of the information the younger Wangji must know.

"I mourned Wei Ying for 13 years," Wangji says, soft, truthful. His younger self focuses on him sharply, "The fact that he exists now - alive and healthy - is mere *chance*. A chance granted by the actions of others rather than my own." He swallows remembered pain and continues. They don't have much time before their husbands return.

"Mourn?" Lan Zhan asks, concerned. There's no deep attachment there, not yet. The beginnings of attraction? Yes. Curiosity? Most definitely. But love or true affection? No.

Wangji knows himself so he chooses his words carefully, "He is ours now because we were fortunate. Do not take that for granted. He will make enemies. He will sacrifice his entire being before he compromises on his honor or morality. He loves me beyond anything and even I cannot sway him away from the righteous path. If he must face the world to save a few innocent souls, he will do it. He *has* done it."

Lan Zhan's eyes gleam. His younger self, even diligent and obedient as he is, has already started to understand the world. He understands that truly righteous people are rare. Wangji stokes the budding admiration with his words, "Don't take him for granted. Our worlds aren't similar. You may never lose him. But if you do lose him, you may not get the same chance as I did."

Lan Zhan swallows and turns away. Wangji lets him contemplate his words as he sips his cooling tea.

"He is... lively."

Wangji huffs in amusement, "Lively, bright, more beautiful than either of us can bear, certainly. But-" He hides a small smile behind his cup, "He yields beautifully to us."

Lan Zhan's ears turn red, "He seems too free-spirited to... *yield*."

Wangji hums and takes a sip, "Wei Ying is responsible and diligent. No matter how carefree he appears, he has never been sheltered or coddled." He watches his younger self curl his fingers, knowing exactly what's going through his mind, "Spoil him. Shower him with praises and gifts. Court him. See him bloom like the most beautiful flower under your care." His younger self's eyes flash and Wangji smiles, "If you are true, you will win him over before long."

There is a beginning of conviction there, in his younger self's eyes, in the set of his shoulders. It is all that Wangji can truly ask for, with this little time that they have, and he adds one last thing. One thing that *he* struggled with, and knows this younger self needs advice on.

"You must learn to talk with him. Be honest. Be *open*. He will return your sentiments a hundred-fold," Wangji finishes his tea as Lan Zhan thinks on that.

"He," Lan Zhan begins, thoughtful, "is good. For us."

"He is," Wangji agrees. "And we are good for him." He has faith that Lan Zhan will realize what he really means—that they make each other better, a mutual growth of self and love.

Amidst the Jingshi's silence, he can hear the tell-tale raucousness of Wei Ying returning, even from a distance. It is unsurprising that their tea with shufu did not last long—two of Wei Ying may seem heaven to Wangji, but for most others it is at least one too many. "Do not take your own words lightly; believe sincerely," Wangji tosses him the rules as one last statement of advice, lips curled in a smile.

Lan Zhan looks surprised for a moment, then slightly amused.

The door opens and his Wei Ying looks them over before walking towards Wangji. He's nibbling on some of the biscuits and Wangji is filled with concern,

"Did you eat properly?" Between working on getting them back and traveling to a different dimension, had his husband eaten properly? Wei Ying seems to notice his concerns and is quick to reassure him.

"Aiya Lan Zhan, you don't have to worry! Halfway through our tea, Xichen-ge came to check in on us and he came bearing snacks." Wei Ying comes closer and sits in his lap, cuddling closer to his chest, "I missed you" he whispers and for a moment they sit there together.

Wangji locks his hands around Wei Ying's waist, pressing a kiss to his neck. He glances over his husband's shoulder to see A-Ying stand frozen and both their selves red in the face.

"Mn, missed Wei Ying too," He says and Wei Ying shivers, "Ah Lan Zhan, we'll have some catching up to do on our *everyday*." He teases, before finally turning around, still in his lap, to look at the other two.

They're both looking away from each other. Lan Zhan's ears are bright red and a-Ying is blushing all over with his hand over his mouth, eyes squeezed tightly shut. Wangji feels a curl of amusement at the sight, especially when Lan Zhan composes himself faster and glances at Wei Ying's flushed face. His Wei Ying makes an intrigued sound when Lan Zhan becomes immediately arrested by it, a curiously challenging light entering his eyes.

Wangji does love to torment his Wei Ying and Lan Zhan seems to be reaching the same realization before their very eyes.

"Hoho," His Wei Ying whispers under his breath, leaning against Wangji with a delighted grin, "Look at the babies, er-gege, growing right in front of us."

a-Ying finally composes himself but he pointedly doesn't look at Lan Zhan or them, "Wei...-qianbei, you were saying something about returning me to my own body?" Wei Ying hums, his expression sly, "When... can you manage it?"

His Wei Ying tilts his head, bringing his lips to Wangji's ear, "I have a solution that may work-" He says but his voice conveys that he's up to mischief, "But if my husband wishes to... *sample* me in this form first, I can certainly delay." The offer is teasing and meaningless, of course. Wei Ying will never violate his younger self's consent like that even if Wangji desired it, but it does make him want to bite and leave behind his mark.

Wangji levels a warning look at his grinning beloved and looks at their younger selves. a-Ying is looking away again and Lan Zhan has a fierce, protective light in his eyes that Wangji is heartened to see. The beginnings of attachment - good.

It is a fierceness he, himself, still experiences when it comes to Wei Ying. Wei Ying giggles, having seen it as well, and slides off Wangji's lap to go tweak Lan Zhan's nose, which is reddening to match his ears. a-Ying actually squeaks when he does it. "We can do it now; I've been too long without my husband, you know?"

a-Ying's face is flushed fully, and Wangji finds that a good look on his husband; he will have to tease out that look later, when they are alone again and everyone is back in their true bodies.

"Here," he shuffles through the notes that Wangji and a-Ying had collected through Cloud Recesses, pulls out a half-made talisman with a flourish, "all we need to do is activate it at the same time; let me re-draw it and we can begin. a-Ying, over here." His younger self starts, but follows him obediently to the desk further in the room and watches closely as Wei Ying explains the talisman in a low voice.

"Mingshi," Wangji says when they have a complete, new copy of the talisman in cinnabar.

"Of course, of course, we don't want to upset shufu," Wei Ying doesn't seem upset by that prospect as he slings himself toward Wangji again, ignoring the barely-hidden looks of jealousy from their younger selves.

Wei Ying stands up and moves towards the door, Wangi following by his side. He looks back towards the other two, "Well? Come along now!" They move, a-Ying avoiding looking at any

of them. Lan Zhan keeps his gaze forward and the walk to the Mingshi is slow as they route to avoid disciples.

Once they are inside and seated, Wei Ying places the talisman on the desk and makes another one similar to it before handing it to A-Ying. He steps back from the table, "A-Ying come here," The younger Wei Ying who was looking over the talisman comes closer to him, "All we need now is some blood."

Wei Ying bites his thumb and A-Ying copies him, two drops on each paper. Wei Ying reaches forward to grab onto the other's hand as the talismans glow and everyone in the room holds their breath.

A moment passes, and Wei Ying opens his eyes, and immediately drops A-Ying's hand, who smiles. "It's done!" His Wei Ying is back in his own body.

Wangji watches the transition in fascination. Wei Ying and a-Ying are quite different, not just in appearance but also in how they hold themselves. His husband looks looser and more settled the moment their bodies switch back.

a-Ying sways, looking slightly pale. Wangji steps forward in concern even as Wei Ying comes to stand beside him, looking as healthy as ever. Fortunately, Lan Zhan is closer and he doesn't hesitate to reach out and steady a-Ying. Wangji feels amusement stir within him at his younger self's tentativeness. He pulls a-Ying closer, directing some qi into him as a-Ying slumps tiredly.

"Why aren't you affected?" a-Ying asks, almost petulantly, staring at Wei Ying. His husband just shrugs, leaning into his side. Wangji places a hand on the small of his back, unable to help touching him.

"I am older, I have higher cultivation and demand more resources from the body. Your body is tired and will need some time to recover. Your Lan Zhan experienced the same thing." a-Ying turns his head away, another blush lighting his cheeks.

"You can rest in the Jingshi along with Lan Zhan while Wei Ying and I deal with our pending responsibilities. We will arrange for your return tomorrow," Wangji informs them. Sending a-Ying and Lan Zhan back so quickly would place unnecessary strain on their bodies. He looks at his younger self, "I trust you will take care of our a-Ying?"

Lan Zhan narrows his eyes and nods curtly. Wangji studies him for a moment before nodding in reply. As their younger selves prepare to leave, he leans forward, intent on pressing an affectionate kiss to Wei Ying's forehead. He may be grateful for his husband's return but some part of him will miss this younger, more innocent version of him.

He pauses and arches a brow when a-Ying is pulled out of his reach and tucked protectively behind his younger self. "Mn?"

Lan Zhan glares, "Do not take such liberties with him."

Wei Ying chuckles and pulls him away, "Aiya, husband, stop teasing a-Zhan and come along."

Wangji lets his amusement show as Wei Ying pulls him away. Once the other two have disappeared down the back paths, he turns to Wei Ying, who has an exaggerated pout and immediately says, "Aiyo, Lan Zhan, am I no good for you anymore? Only showing favor to my younger self?"

"Mn," he can't help a smile. Oh, he missed his husband, his beloved, his heart. Though they are outside—admittedly, in a secluded area—he reels Wei Ying in with a hand around his waist, pressing a kiss first to his forehead, then to his lips. It is tempting, to ignore their duties further and instead give in to the needs and wants coursing through him. But he cannot rest easy until he knows that their younger selves are returned to their proper time and place. Wei Ying seems to agree; he pulls away (albeit regretfully) to straighten his robes.

"Xichen-ge? I believe we might have sent shufu into a qi-deviation earlier; he deserves some," Wei Ying's eyes sparkle as he thinks of an appropriate word, "*peace*."

"We can tell xiongzhang what has occurred; I will visit shufu later," Wangji keeps a hand around Wei Ying's waist as they continue down the paths. *I will ensure shufu has not had a heart attack* goes unsaid.

They stop by Lan Xichen's place and Wangji knocks at the door followed by Wei Ying's loud "Xichen-ge! Its us!"

They wait patiently as the door opens to reveal the man in question, who smiles as he looks them over, "Wangji, Wuxian" he greets as he steps aside to let them in and they greet him as well.

Once inside and comfortably seated, Wei Ying mentions about yesterday "Xichen-ge...remember when you came to visit yesterday and Lan Zhan was acting..unusually?" Lan Xichen looks up from where he was putting water to boil, a bit puzzled and curious, "You see! That was Lan Zhan from our younger days."

The smile stiffens on his face, he takes a moment to process before he responds, "Whatever do you mean, Wuxian?" And Wangji meets Lan Xichen's perturbed stare steadily.

Wei Ying, observant as he is apt to be, attempts to quell Xichen's disbelief: "Aiyah, Xichen-ge, there are really two versions of your beloved brothers in Cloud Recesses right now! I know this is probably hard to imagine, but turns out travel throughout timelines is actually possible!"

Wangji nods his agreement, "Xiongzhang, we would not tell you falsehoods. This is a matter of utmost importance, and it is prudent that we inform you now."

A few millet grain's worth of tension trickle out of Lan Xichen's static figure, likely imagining Lan Qiren's shock at this time transcending development. Xichen has been busy with Discussion Conference-related matters recently and they didn't have the opportunity to explain things to him. Wei Ying had only informed their uncle and no one else.

Lan Xichen steps to the low table Wangji and Wei Ying are seated at with a painted tea set in tow. Wangji notes the perilously positioned pot of steaming liquid and reaches out to right it. As he does, Lan Xichen gives a barely perceptible sigh.

"Your claim does have basis; the... other Wangji seemed rather harried when I approached." There is the smallest of furrows still in his silken brows, but Wangji is not discouraged. His brother will fully concede to the truth of his beloved's word once they are able to provide evidence.

The discussion lasts for nearly a shichen. They don't need to worry about the impact of their travels on their timeline but Wangji is concerned about its influence on the other dimension. Xichen briefly considers erasing their younger selves' memories but both Wei Ying and he oppose it.

"Neither of them are reckless or stupid." Wei Ying says bluntly, "I have full confidence in their ability to navigate this situation. My only concern is... a-Ying's situation."

Xichen's expression softens and Wangji curls his fingers into fists, remembering the hidden longing in a-Ying's eyes when he saw what future held for him. "I have spoken to Lan Zhan."

"He is too young to influence this, my love." Wei Ying closes his eyes briefly, his expression pained, "I fear..." He trails off.

"Come now, Wuxian," Xichen smiles, "I can't imagine there's a version of Wangji that doesn't desire you." Wei Ying looks up, startled, "And Lans aren't in the habit of denying Wangji anything. You will find that if Wangji wishes to marry you, uncle and I will make it happen, regardless of the circumstances."

Gray eyes light with laughter and turn towards him. Wangji just closes his eyes and takes a sip of his tea, "Aiya, Lan Zhan is very spoiled, isn't he?"

Xichen smiles, happy to have dispelled Wei Ying's worries. They don't linger long after that. When they return to the Jingshi, only Lan Zhan is awake. Wangji feels a curl of amusement at his younger self's stiff expression as he sits on the bed, with a sleeping Wei Ying's fingers curled around his sleeve.

"Aiya, you could just sleep with him, you know? My er-gege likes to hold me tight, I don't imagine you're any different, a-Zhan." Wei Ying teases, leaning against him. Wangji promptly demonstrates how much he likes to hold his husband by curling an arm around him and pulling him closer. His younger self turns away with red ears.

But, he looks at the sleeping Wei Ying with consideration in his eyes, and Wangji squeezes his Wei Ying's waist to stop him from commenting on it.

It does not stop Wei Ying from poking fun at a-Ying when the younger awakes, again dragging him off to his work desk to tease him and share some talismans. Lan Zhan hovers over them, still unsure but still protective, and Wangji finds himself content to merely observe while he deals with some papers that piled up in his absence.

Their evening meal is brought to the Jingshi by Sizhui, who shyly asks if he can eat with them—as if any iteration of their selves would decline such a sweet boy, their son. The young a-Ying, already taken with Sizhui from their earlier meeting, engages him throughout the meal, disregarding the rule against speaking. Sizhui does as well, answering questions about his training, the night hunts he's taken, how life is at Cloud Recesses.

Lan Zhan perks up when Sizhui mentions the rabbits, and Wangji's heart warms. It is good that this younger self of his knows of his relaxed attitude toward the rules, of his acceptance and cultivation of the things that he likes. The Cloud Recesses of his younger years had sometimes not felt like a home, but merely a place he was born and where he lived. Now, though, his younger self can see that he can create a home.

"I have a lot of hope for them," Wei Ying says wistfully later that evening, as their younger selves have gone off to sleep in Sizhui's old room at the far end of the Jingshi from their own bed. Wangji drops a kiss to his shoulder and leans closer, humming in agreement as he presses gentle kisses along Wei Wuxian's face. The two just cuddling closer together for the night, "Lan Zhan..." Wei Ying asks looking up at him, "What do you think would be the biggest difference?"

He thinks it over and directly kisses him, "We'll be married." His Wei Ying chuckles as he lies onto Wangji's chest. Wangji secures a hand in Wei Ying's hair, combing through them as he leans into the touch, the other on his waist until his breaths even out.

Wangji looks at his peaceful face and places a gentle kiss on top of his forehead, and closes his eyes, the room filled with only the breathing of its sleeping occupants.

He is woken up by stirring on top of him as Wei Ying rests his head on Wangji's neck, his soft breathing against Wangji's skin, their limbs in a tangled mess, he strokes his back and Wei Ying nuzzles into him.

Wangji knows it is time to wake but he lingers in bed for a moment, just soaking in Wei Ying's presence. They have been apart longer than this but it is never a pleasant experience. Wangji doesn't like to be away from his husband. He doesn't want to feel the hollowness Wei Ying's absence brings ever again. He looks down at Wei Ying's peaceful face and brings his hand to a sleep-warm cheek, caressing the smooth skin gently.

Wangji pulls him closer, pressing whisper-soft kisses to his husband's forehead and eyes. Wei Ying is too accustomed to these little touches to wake. He only presses in closer and continues resting peacefully.

He senses movement and turns around to see Lan Zhan lingering hesitantly, awake but uncertain. Wangji turns his body and eases his husband off his chest, placing him on the bed. Wei Ying makes a muffled sound of protest but Wangji shushes him, running his fingers through his hair and arranging the covers over him to keep him warm. He only gets off the bed once Wei Ying is settled.

Lan Zhan glances at Wei Ying and looks behind him to the sleeping a-Ying, his expression faintly wondrous. They prepare for the day silently and step out, letting the other two sleep.

"You love him..." Lan Zhan says finally, "and are loved in return."

"It is a hard-earned love," Wangji cautions, crossing his arms behind his back and staring down at his younger self solemnly, "His love is a privilege, Lan Zhan. Fight for it. Protect it. Nurture it with gentleness."

Lan Zhan glances back into the Jingshi and nods.

Both versions of Wei Ying wake a couple of shichen after Wangji. It is somewhat amusing to see his husband fuss over his younger self but the concerned expression makes Wangji wonder. Wei Ying is very reluctant to send his younger self back but he must go.

Once the mid-day meal is done, their younger selves are sent back to their world.

It is, in the end, a simple thing to do—another of Wei Ying's incredible talismans, one that he pointedly does not teach to his younger self.

Again, they activate it in the Mingshi, Shufu attending to ensure that nothing goes awry. Wangji is thankful that this particular trial will soon be over, but as a-Ying fidgets out a goodbye to Wei Ying and turns to him, he cannot help but feel he will miss their younger selves.

"Remember that there are those who will help you," he reminds Wei Ying, taking the opportunity of Lan Zhan being pulled into a tight hug by Wei Ying to finally press that kiss to his forehead. This Wei Ying will not have to face the sadness that his Wei Ying did; and, even if sadness does come, he has his Lan Zhan by his side.

a-Ying shuffles back, flushed bright red, and Wangji turns to Lan Zhan, cupping his hands and bowing to his younger self. "Lan Wangji," he says.

"Hanguang-jun," Lan Zhan bows in return. It is incredible to see how he has settled, in their short time together.

"Remember what we talked of, trials and errors may have their impact," *But they must not bring harm to our loved ones*, goes unsaid as Lan Zhan nods, this message lingering between them.

The younger two move behind the array. Wangji sees Wei Ying wait for Shufu who looks contemplative, "Be strong Wangji, Wuxian, and be well," He bids his own farewell.

A-Ying and younger Wangji's eyes linger over them as Wei Ying brings up the two talismans, biting his thumb and letting his blood drop onto the paper. Wangji does the same as he brings up his own hand, as soon as the blood mixes the talisman glow and attach to each of their younger counterpart.

Wei Ying's eyes glow a crimson red as he commands, "*Return.*" Slowly the figure's of their past selves become lighter and lighter, as if fading away, Wangji shows a rare smile towards them, "Be good." Before they disappear completely.

His Wei Ying tips forward and Lan Wangji steadies him.

There's something strange about Lan er-gongzi and Wei-gongzi. When the Guest Disciples arrived, Nie Huaisang had cautioned Wei Wuxian about Lan Wangji. At that time, Huaisang was certain he had taken it as a challenge. But Wei-xiong had returned from the alcohol run with a contemplative frown and an intrigued light in his pretty gray eyes - *they are indeed pretty, Huaisang is tempted to paint his portrait.*

The days that followed are, frankly *baffling*. Wei-xiong almost seems fascinated by the Second Jade, always seeking his company, always dancing around him with a brilliant smile. Lan Wangji, instead of being irritated, seems to welcome the attention with soft silences and gentle nods. The more he looks at them, the more they seem like great friends. It takes them very little time to nail non-verbal communication. They seem to speak to each other with quick glances and arched brows.

Huaisang is intrigued by it all, especially when he sees how it affects everyone else. The Lans seem very surprised but also... cautiously pleased. From what Huaisang understands, Lan Wangji hasn't been able to connect with others as well as Lan Xichen has. Seeing him getting along well with such a prodigious peer may ease some of their concern.

The Jiangs, on the other hand, are anything but pleased. Jiang Wanyin is always on the verge of a spiteful rant. The Jiang disciples don't know what to do when their Head Disciple isn't covering up for them. The more they try to intervene, the more they alienate their da-shixiong and enrage his very protective new friend.

Honestly, if he had known Cloud Recesses would be so interesting, wouldn't have wasted so much energy on protests. He would've agreed to come willingly.

Not that he would ever admit that to Da-ge, now. No, instead Huaisang takes careful, gleeful note of the actions of Wei-xiong and his Lan-er-gongzi (because, truly, they seem to belong to each other and Huaisang is not sure if any of the Lans have even realized as such yet) and the handsome couple they make.

Oh, now there's an idea.

End Notes

Like the first story we wrote (A Strange Encounter) we left some things ambiguous without intending to answer them (what originally caused the time travel, how WWX and little!LWJ got to the future, etc.). That is to say, we don't have answers if you ask about them!

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